DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 058 548 AC 012 262

TITLE	Industrial Relations Training: A Systematic Approach.
INSTITUTION	Food, Drink and Tobacco Industry Training Board, Croydon (England).
NOTE	18p.
AVAILABLE FROM	The Food, Drink and Tobacco Industry Training Board, Leon House, High Street, Croydon CR9 3NT, England (35 pence)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrative Personnel; Administrator Guides; Behavioral Objectives; Employer Employee Relationship; *Industrial Relations; Industry; Labor Demands; *Management Education; On the Job Training; Problem Solving; *Professional Continuing Education; *Training Techniques; White Collar Occupations

ABSTRACT

This guide focuses attention on the need to improve industrial relations, both present and future. It attempts to persuade managers to devote more of their thinking and negotiating skills to reconciling the differences between their company's and its employees' interests. The guide also aims at encouraging companies to prepare for the industrial relations aspect of increasing social and technological change. The recommended systematic approach to training is presented in outline form, as a useful checklist for senior managers, as well as specialist staff, in all medium-and large-sized companies. The outline provides brief discussions of the following topics: What is causing the problems?; What training is needed?; Under whose watchful eye?; How to start a program; Assessing possible training needs: Check list; Is it really a training need?; The list becomes a training plan; Training needs by category; Introductory training; What decides the training method?; Have the objectives been met?; and To sum up. (DB)

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS TRAINING A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

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TRAINING A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

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Introduction

What is meant by 'industrial relations'?

Industrial relations is generally understood to be simply union-management relations. In fact, it is an aspect of *total* business behaviour whose conflicts stem from decisions at *all* levels, and in *all* areas, including:

- changes in payment
- automation
- new machinery
- changes in methods
- new product lines
- redundancy
- new factories
- international co-operation

These conflicts are often more complex than straight union-management disagreement. Because the manager is seldom the owner of the business, they tend to be *company*-employee conflicts which, because of the differences between company and individual goals, are never completely reconcilable.

How training can help

Training can improve industrial relations by helping people to be more aware of the situations and relationships which cause industrial relations problems. This very awareness can lead to a greater ability to deal with the problems. Training is also essential to ensure that the rules of industrial relations behaviour are learned – the complexity of which depends on the size and complexity of the organisation itself.

The purpose of this guide

This guide sets out to focus attention on the need to improve industrial relations, both present and future; to persuade managers to devote more of their thinking and negotiating skills to reconciling the differences between their company's and its employees' interests; and to encourage companies to prepare for the industrial relations aspects of increasing social and technological change.

It is *not* meant to be a comprehensive treatise on either industrial relations or training methods, but rather an outline of how the Board's recommended systematic approach to training can be applied in this complex area. The Board believes that it will form a useful check list for senior managers, as well as specialist staff, in all medium-sized and large companies.

Because of the potential scale of industrial relations training needs, the Board emphasises that training should start simply and grow gradually in line with identified priorities.

What is causing the problems?

In recent years the responsibility for industrial relations decisions has tended to fall increasingly on individual companies rather than on industry-wide agreements. This has resulted in new functions and additional pressures for managers, unions, workers' representatives, and, in particular, first line supervisors, who are immediately between management and employees.

Other major factors are also affecting the national industrial relations climate, and therefore the climate inside individual companies, among them: the less clear educational gap between management and workers; the growing rejection of rigid authoritarianism in any shape or form; the degree of legislation; and changing technology—each of which demands a radical re-think of traditional roles and values.

A feature of many companies which tends to aggravate the situation is the lack of a satisfactorily defined and understood means of communication between employees and management.

What training is needed?

Good industrial relations seldom happen as a result of luck or tradition. Whether consciously or otherwise, they must be created – *by management and employees* who understand their environment and the effect of their actions on the industrial relations situation. Such an understanding can be the product of training designed to:

– *develop* the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary to implement existing policies, procedures and agreements

– *prepare* for change in policies, procedure and agreements

– *contribute* to improving defined industrial relations problems

– *relate* industrial relations at company level to national development, e.g. new legislation.

More precisely, the most important broad training needs are for *management* at all levels to understand the industrial relations implications inherent in all its decisions; and for *all employees* (through sound induction training) to understand the agreements and laws affecting their employment; to recognise the realities of their company's competitive situation; and to understand the channels of communication through which agreement should be reached. In the case of *trade union representatives*, the unions will of course be totally involved with the industrial relations content of their training.

Under whose watchful eye?

Industrial relations is an important and complex subject for which a senior manager should have overall responsibility. It is important that the same manager should be responsible for assessing the needs and planning the training. This will ensure that all training is directly geared to the company's industrial relations policy and objectives. Where the industrial relations manager does not have a close knowledge of training techniques he should have the assistance of a qualified training officer or outside consultant.

The major tasks of the manager responsible should be to:

– help develop the overall strategy and relate national to company industrial relations developments

– define company industrial relations training needs and assign priorities

– discuss and agree their particular training needs with management and unions or employee representatives

– design flexible training programmes to meet the company's present and anticipated industrial relations needs

– develop methods of evaluating the effectiveness of training

– above all, help create an environment in which people are not afraid to examine their own attitudes and assumptions, and in which they can learn, whether by formal 'training' or through everyday experience.

To be successful he must:

– play a major part in the development of company policy and thinking on industrial relations

– clearly understand the national industrial relations situation

– see industrial relations as an aspect of total business activity, as well as a set of procedures

– have the respect and confidence of all concerned.

How to start a programme

In order to transform general industrial relations training needs into more detailed plans, the Board recommends that companies should first carry out the diagnostic process advocated in all its guides and recommendations – *bearing in mind the following important points:*

- Because the subject of industrial relations is by definition a controversial one, no attempt should be made to begin the assessment, or plan training, before consulting and obtaining the full commitment of *all* those likely to be affected by it – from boardroom downwards. Employee representatives should be involved in both the diagnosis and planning stages.
- Training should start simply and be regarded, like industrial relations, as an 'organic' process. It should grow from simple beginnings, each stage revealing what the next should be.
- All training should be clearly related to the company's situation. Where outside resources, such as colleges, are used, they should have a thorough understanding of the company situation so that courses can be related to it. Standard packages should be avoided except for subjects of very general application, such as writing, public speaking, and legislation.
- Industrial relations affects everyone and is largely a matter of communication and interaction. Training therefore needs to be looked at as a whole rather than for individual groups.
- Attitudes and often unexpressed assumptions have a major effect on behaviour, particularly where industrial relations is concerned.
- To be successful, training should be related to predetermined industrial relations policies and objectives, which in their turn will be closely linked with overall company objectives.

Assessing possible training needs: check list

The following check list cites examples of the *types* of question a company should ask itself *in respect of each category of employee.* Answering the questions may also indicate gaps and inadequacies in the defining of industrial relations policy.

Major categories to be considered should be:

- senior management
- middle management
- line
- specialist
- first line supervisors
- personnel/training staff
- employee representatives
- factory and clerical staff

Investigation area	Possible training need
1. *What are the company's policy, broad objectives, attitudes and rules concerning industrial relations?* Are these known, understood and accepted at all levels?	Lack of real knowledge, or acceptance, of the objectives on a policy basis.
2. *Are there defined negotiating and consultative procedures within which these objectives may be discussed?* Are these known, understood, accepted, and effective at all levels? Are they comprehensive or are they in practice supplemented? Are the roles of each level of management and union representative clear and fully understood? What is discussed/not discussed? Is there a willingness to discuss *real* issues at all levels? Are there any areas where attitudes to the system, and the role and authority of people within it, jeopardise its effective working?	Are people at all levels sufficiently knowledgeable and positive enough to be able to contribute effectively? Consideration should be given to the subjects constituting these procedures such as discipline, efficiency, safety, welfare and productivity as well as to identifying those people who will be most involved in these areas. Joint consultative arrangements can be used as a vehicle for training activity. Members of consultative committees may need training in their role as committee members especially in such areas as communication skills.
3. *What are the channels of communication for matters other than consultation and negotiation between* *– various levels of management?* *– management and employees?*	Failure to consult groups or individuals may cause resentment, ill-will and obstruction. Need for communications training to define system and skills.

Investigation area	Possible training need
Are these: (a) understood? (b) agreed? (c) used? (d) effective? Are any groups formally or informally omitted?	
4. *Has the company defined employment conditions, pay structures, grievance procedures, etc.?* Are these known, understood and accepted at all levels? Are there informal as well as defined agreements and practices? Do people act in line with these conditions? Which do not?	Lack of knowledge at any level about current procedures.
5. *Are there any definable problem areas or apparent needs for improvement in industrial relations?* Number of disputes and their location? Too many disputes reaching second or third level in procedure? Wage and salary systems? Rigid or destructive attitudes at any level blocking development? High absenteeism/labour turnover? Safety, health, welfare?	

Assessing possible training needs: check list [continued]

Investigation area	Possible training need
6. *Are any significant changes planned in industrial relations policies, procedures or agreements during the next two years, e.g. caused by changes in technology or external pressures?* Who defines these? Who will decide whether to adopt new policies? How will changes be communicated to those most affected? Will all levels be consulted before changes are introduced?	Training activity at all levels can be aimed at developing readiness for change.
7. *What are the likely effects of future industrial relations developments:* – on the ROLES and FUNCTIONS of individuals and groups? – on their ATTITUDES? – on the amount of KNOWLEDGE and EXPERTISE that will be required? – on PRESSURES, both physical and psychological?	Training needs could be related to general preparation for, and implementation of changes.
8. *Have people whose jobs can markedly affect industrial relations been sufficiently prepared?* Is industrial relations training a recognised part of the training of all managers/supervisors? Do newly elected shop stewards receive introductory training? Is relevant industrial relations training built into induction programmes for all new employees?	Line managers making decisions unaware of industrial relations implications is a frequent source of strife.

Is it really a training need?

This assessment, if carried out honestly and in depth, should focus attention on certain problems, some of which may have escaped notice hitherto. Many of these will not be solvable in training terms but may involve reorganisation, the development of new systems, etc. The next step therefore is to identify possible training needs as compared with organisational issues.

The remaining needs should then be grouped under job categories, and *specific* training objectives decided in respect of each group and problem area.

Specific training needs

Most specific training needs arise in connection with people or groups of people who:

- do not have sufficient knowledge and/or skill to fulfil their industrial relations role (present or anticipated)
- are not clear about, or are unwilling to accept, their industrial relations role
- have attitudes which stop them communicating effectively with other groups.

Training objectives

The objectives of each specific area of training should then be decided in the context of the company's overall industrial relations objectives. All training should aim to clarify, improve or change the company's industrial relations (present or anticipated) within that context. In deciding these objectives some means of measuring the extent to which they are achieved should also be agreed.

The list becomes a training plan

Before proceeding to finalise a training plan, it may be useful to ask the following questions:

- should the conclusions reached so far be re-checked?
- how should the training start – with something 'easy' or an area which will start people thinking? (Industrial relations training should preferably start from simple beginnings and be allowed to grow naturally.)
- where should the training start: with which group? What repercussions might this have on other groups?
- is anyone likely to be 'touchy' about the idea of training?
- are there any problems about training in the present industrial relations situation?
- are there areas where joint training might be useful?

The plan should now be prepared and turned into a viable programme by deciding the method of instruction, the identity of the instructor, and when and where the training should take place.

Training needs by category

In many companies, areas of training need for major groups of employees will be within the pattern of the following examples.

In all groups there is likely to be an over-riding need for people to gain insight into their own behaviour and its effect on other people.

Jobs and categories with direct Industrial Relations involvement

Category	Subject area
Directors and Senior Managers Responsible for creating industrial relations policy and the assessment of training needs arising from it. This implies the knowledge and skills required by middle managers.	**1.** Up-to-date understanding of the national industrial relations situation and its relationship to company's situation. **2.** Understanding of company's industrial relations policy, framework and operation. **3.** Knowledge of union-company consultative procedure and the roles of people at each level within this. **4.** Understanding and utilisation of specialist industrial relations and personnel management functions. **5.** Knowledge of industrial relations practices, e.g. grievance and disciplinary procedures. **6.** Knowledge of effective means of communication. **7.** Understanding of human and work organisation and behaviour patterns.
Middle (line) management Managers at this level, in many cases, are involved in contributing to industrial relations policy. This entails considerable skill and knowledge on the part of those closely concerned and knowledge of the broad framework on the part of others.	**1.** Up-to-date understanding of national industrial relations situation and framework and its relationship to company's own situation. **2.** Understanding of company's industrial relations policy and operation, and own role within this. **3.** Working knowledge of all consultative and negotiating procedures. **4.** Knowledge of union organisation and roles of full-time officials and stewards. **5.** Knowledge of appropriate legislation. **6.** Knowledge of pay and incentive systems and work measurement (a) in company (b) outside.

Possible methods	Common barriers to learning
Outside courses. Seminars. Tailor-made, in-company exercises possibly devised by consultants working with company trainers. Participation in industrial relations training of *other* categories. Regular discussions with industrial relations specialists, senior union officials, other specialists. Project work – often the most realistic and effective for this category.	Some of the barriers likely to be met in organising training at this level include lack of time, insulation from real disagreements by organisational structure (people may only tell senior managers what they think they would like to hear) and difficulty in enabling senior managers to identify their own learning need.
Formal management courses, especially those with industrial relations slant – internal or external. Planned experience *inside* consultative bodies. Temporary attachment to personnel and industrial relations departments. Regular, informed discussions with union officials. Participation in industrial relations training of junior management and workers' representatives. Project work.	Some of the barriers likely to be met in organising training at this level include lack of time, defensive attitudes towards undertaking training and a tendency to narrow rather than broad outlook owing to involvement in day-to-day problems. Incomplete understanding of management role in industrial relations.

Training needs by category [continued]

Category	Subject area
Middle (line) management continued	
	7. Use, function, and value of industrial relations and personnel specialist. **8.** Understanding of effects of decisions/actions on total industrial relations of company. **9.** Understanding of human and work organisation and behaviour patterns.
Junior (line) managers and supervisors	
Line managers have an integral part to play in the development and maintenance of sound industrial relations – involving a detailed knowledge of procedures.	**1.** Detailed knowledge of consultative and negotiating procedures. **2.** Clear understanding of own position in industrial relations framework, and limits of authority. **3.** Knowledge of broad legal provisions concerning performance of work. **4.** Complete understanding and acceptance of role of shop steward. 5. Detailed knowledge of pay and incentive schemes, and other management techniques relevant to industrial relations. **6.** Understanding and utilisation of industrial relations and personnel functions. **7.** Clear understanding of likely effects of decisions/actions on other groups. **8.** Understanding of the importance of industrial relations terms of effective leadership and good human relations in own department/section. **9.** Development of personal, social and communication skills. **10.** Working knowledge of – work study – cost accountancy – job evaluation.

Possible methods	Common Barriers to learning
Formal courses – *preferably in company* – with project follow-up. Group discussions and development exercises with other categories if possible. Involvement in consultative procedures. Temporary secondment to specialist industrial relations and personnel departments. Regular discussions with immediate superior and industrial relations specialists.	Some of the barriers likely to be met in organising training at this level include lack of time, strongly entrenched attitudes to unions and senior management, uncertainty of position, role, and authority, and defensiveness about formal learning situations.

Training needs by category [continued]

Category	Subject area
Trade Union (workplace) representatives	
Concerned with detailed day-to-day negotiation within company *NOTE* Since external trade union officials will have an interest in the training of shop stewards, their advice at the start of any such training should be sought.	**1.** Knowledge of national industrial relations framework and of the company's position in relation to it **2.** Knowledge of structure, powers and rules of union and own role within the union. **3.** Detailed knowledge of industrial relations procedures, rules and broad legal provisions. **4.** Social and communicating skills – both written and spoken. **5.** Education in numeracy, in preparation for (a) negotiating, (b) union book-keeping. **6.** Knowledge of company's management organisation and relationships, and roles of specialists. **7.** Working knowledge of – work study – cost accountancy – job evaluation – industrial health and safety matters.
Personnel and IR specialists	**1.** Thorough understanding of requirements of company industrial relations policy. **2.** Ability and insight to view company IR situation "in the round" and to be able to relate functions of various institutions inside the total framework. **3.** Ability to accept new ideas of human organisation and motivation and to translate these into terms which are meaningful to line and other specialist managers. **4.** Continually updated knowledge of national. regional and local IR developments and their relation to the company situation. **5.** (a) Depth knowledge of pay and incentive systems and other management techniques relevant to industrial relations. (b) Depth knowledge of procedures and national and company IR situations. **6.** Knowledge of manpower planning and utilisation, accounting techniques.

Possible Methods	Common barriers to learning
Day or block-release courses, general education including English and mathematics. Official union courses. Joint company-union courses. Discussions with senior union officers and management.	Some of the barriers likely to be met in organising training at this level include company or union apathy or policy and the difficulty of arranging well-timed training, e.g. of recognising people likely to develop as employee representatives and providing early training.
Professional training and broad approach as for middle and senior management. Whatever can be seen in most cases as valuable for management level. Industrial relations or personnel specialists to have some experience of group behavioural techniques.	**1.** Excessive detailed involvement leads to broad picture being lost. Interest with limited aspects of industrial relations, e.g. negotiation, resulting in less interest in other aspects. **2.** inability to relate at right level or frequency with other managers, particularly senior management.

Introductory training

Apart from the specialist training outlined in the previous examples, all new employees require some basic training. So, too, do established employees appointed to a new position involving a changed industrial relations role.

New employees

The induction programme for all new employees should include an explanation of the conditions and procedures affecting their jobs. This is particularly important for younger trainees. Induction training is to be dealt with fully in the Board's Guide on Training Plans and Programmes. From the industrial relations point of view, however, it should cover information about the company, its organisation, products, markets and methods; rate and method of pay, hours of work, overtime, holidays and sickness; Contracts of Employment Act; welfare, timekeeping and payment procedures, trade union membership.

New appointments

Introductory training in industrial relations is equally important for anyone appointed to a new job, particularly that of shop steward and/or supervisor, where the holder's industrial relations role is changed. In such cases, training should be as outlined in the earlier examples.

What decides the training method?

Methods of training, particularly for such a complex subject as industrial relations, are difficult to describe briefly. They will therefore be the subject of more detailed guidance.

Very broad suggestions have been given in the examples of training need by category, but each case should be decided in the light of many factors including:

- the type of training to be given (for example, knowledge and skills are taught in different ways)
- the company's training facilities and expertise
- the size of the problems confronting the company
- constraints of time and cost, etc., etc.

Have the objectives been met?

Once the training is completed the next stage, as in all systematic training, is to compare results with the original objectives – and to modify strategy and methods accordingly, as and where necessary.

An important point about validation common to all training but worth stressing here is that: *in devising a programme it is essential to build-in criteria* (*i.e. clearly-stated objectives*) *at the planning stage which can be used ultimately in assessing the success or otherwise of the total training effort.* In other words, there should be means of drawing a direct comparison between situations before and after training.

In industrial relations training, the overall objectives are almost always to improve industrial relations awareness and behaviour. Within this, the specific objectives may be increased knowledge, skill or understanding of a particular subject area. To make the objective measurable, however, it must be stated in measurable terms.

e.g. NOT "to give an appreciation of. . . ."

BUT "to improve effectiveness in handling pay grievances, as demonstrated by. . . ."

To sum up

This guide sets out to focus attention on the need to improve industrial relations and to outline how the Board's recommended systematic approach to training can contribute towards this.

Because of the complexity of the subject, it can be no more than an introduction to industrial relations training. More detailed guidance will therefore be made available to interested companies in the form of case studies and seminars.

Systematic cycle in industrial relations training

Examine the company, its plans and problems
Define management responsibilities
Assess overall training needs (the questions)
Consult at all levels
Prepare training programmes (incorporating objectives)
Do training
Compare results with objectives
Re-assess overall needs

(In the case of industrial relations training it is particularly important to be prepared to revise plans at any stage as a result of new developments inside or outside the company or the discovery of new needs revealed by the training activity itself.)

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